DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 257 085 CS 208 909

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TITLE Planning English Language Curriculum: An E.S.P. Approach.
PUB DATE [82]
NOTE 15p.
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Curriculum Design; Curriculum Development; Curriculum Research; *English (Second Language); *English Curriculum; English Instruction; Higher Education; Secondary Education; *Second Language Instruction

ABSTRACT

In designing a course for teaching English as a second language, it is imperative for a curriculum planner to know the present academic attainment and the desired level of performance of the students at the end of the course. The curriculum planner must take sociological, linguistic, psychological and pedagogical factors into consideration. The cyclic nature of teaching can be described as expansion, reinforcement, consolidation, and expansion, with new things taught becoming prerequisites to additional new knowledge. There has been a movement away from the grammatic syllabus toward the functional syllabus, which gives more attention to the communication needs of the learner. English for Special Purposes (ESP) courses need to be designed to encourage development of the desired language skills and language abilities, which include enabling people to meet their social language needs and enabling them to function within a foreign environment. After communicative needs are assessed, a formulation of objectives, the selection and organization of content, implementation, and evaluation must follow. In deciding upon a target level for the achievement of students upon completion of the course, data could be gathered through job surveys and the experience of practicing teachers. To make an assessment of the beginning progress level, one must administer diagnostic tests or know the target level of the preceding course. Teachers should monitor the students' progress intermittently and modify their teaching on the basis of feedback obtained. The final board examination will measure student achievement. (EL)

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PLANNING ENGLISH LANGUAGE CURRICULUM: *An E.S.P. Approach

N.P.Tiwari**

Introduction

SOME of the important components of a teaching learning situation could be identified as the learner, the teacher, the course content, the teaching methodology and techniques and last but not of least importance the evaluation. Teaching is a relationship which is established among all these components. It is a process by which the teacher brings the learners and the subjects together. Through teaching they get information, they learn to work and to do wthings. The focal point of all this academic activity is the learner. No teaching programme can thus ever afford to side-track the students' needs, and interests. Teaching is not an end in itself but a means to an end. The end being bringing about a change in students' behaviour which in other words, could be expressed as causing learning to occur in them. It thus becomes imperative for any teacher, course designer or curriculum planner to have an eye on the present academic attainment of the learners and their expected or desired level of performance at the end of the course.

Designing a course for teaching English language is no exception to the above proposition. Making a mention of the factors affecting the design of a language course, Palmer (1964) has pointed out that "we cannot design a language course until we know something about the students for whom the course is intended, for a programme of study depends on the aim or aims of the students." Palmer further went on to stress that "The length of the course or programme is a most important determining factor." Thus the objectives the students desire to achieve govern the content as well as the duration of the course.

Language Skills

Learning a language essentially involves the learning of skills. According to French "(There are four clear aims which

CS 208 909

* The abbreviation E.S.P. refers to English for Special Purposes.

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are in the limits of possibility; speaking, understanding what is spoken, reading and writing.") These aims are suggestive of the development of the four language skills - listening, speaking, reading and writing. These could be put under two categories - active skills and passive skills. The skills of listening and reading are called passive skills, in that they are chiefly dependent on understanding. On the other hand the skills of speaking and writing are called the active skills since these call for expression as well as, understanding. These language skills could be compared to the muscles of a gymnast which are maintained while the exercise is on and are likely to fade away, if these are not constantly exercised. Any skill by nature and definition involves a process of rigorous practice and training. Because of the involvement of the element of skill development, the language teaching programme, unlike any other types of learning requires a special treatment and a much more cautious handling. In other words, it requires a planned approach to teaching and learning both.

Language Ability

After having given some thought to the skill oriented nature of language teaching, it would be worthwhile discussing the language abilities which need to be developed in the learners. The terms language skills and language abilities are often confused. Sometimes these are used synonymously and are used interchangeably. The term language ability refers to the quantum of language which the students possess at one point in time or aspire to attain at the end of a course of study. These are none other than the number of words (lexical items), and the structures (grammatical patterns). Thus language ability can be quantified in terms of the vocabulary and grammar which the student possesses at a particular point, and is likely to possess at the end of a course of study. It could be better illustrated by a concrete example. Suppose, there is a student who is able to understand, speak, read and write the language appropriately within a range of say 2000 words and 100 grammatical structures of the most elementary kind. He is in a happy position of making use of the language skills given a limited language ability as indicated above. As soon as this student is called upon to use the language beyond this limited range, the language skills show a definite decline. Thus the

language abilities, (the number of words and structures) which the student has mastered, restrict the language skills, he is possessing. It would be very essential therefore, to consider both these dimensions seriously before developing a curriculum of any language course.

Some considerations

To some, designing a language curriculum may seem to prescribe an anthology of prose passages and poems as a text book, some novel or a collection of short stories or some science fiction by way of rapid reader; asking the students to write a few essays and attempt a couple of unseen passages or setting some precis exercises and including the study of some grammatical points here and there. But if one gives a serious thought to the process of planning and designing a language curriculum, it is not so simple a task as it appears to be. The language curriculum planner, of necessity, has to have the following considerations at the back of his mind:

1 Sociological

Any course of study has to fulfill certain social obligations. The young students are trained in the schools and colleges so that they may become good citizens and ultimately serve the society and the nation as a whole after attaining education and training. Before planning a curriculum, a language course designer thus needs to seek the answers to the questions like - do we need the language? for what purposes do we need it? and what kinds of communication are they (learners) likely to engage themselves in?

2 Linguistic

Here the curriculum planner is mainly concerned with arriving at the corpus of linguistic materials to be included in the course. Language learning and teaching is a very comprehensive activity and it is not possible and/or necessary to teach everything to everybody. Hence one has to be selective while taking such crucial decisions as to what to teach and what not to teach. The teachers as the course planners have to seek the answers to questions like - which varieties or the dialects of the language are to be taught? which words and structures will be needed to be

taught? which registers of the language are to be chosen? How are the language being taught and learnt related with each other?

3 Psychological

The course designers simply cannot afford to ignore the psychological principles and theories governing the process of learning while weaving the texture of language curriculum. A vigilant eye needs to be kept on the intelligence level, attitude, aptitude, interest and motivation of the learners. The learner must feel convinced about the relevance of the language content taught, must find the material interesting and the learning tasks challenging enough to keep themselves engrossed.

4 Pedagogical

Mentioned last but never of least importance are the pedagogical considerations. Those designing the language curriculum have to give some thought to the most appropriate learning and teaching strategies so that the predetermined objectives may be achieved. Selection of the appropriate materials and techniques is yet another requirement to be met. The course designers are also required to decide the order and priorities among the various components of the course.

A curriculum, unlike the traditional syllabus (consisting of names of a few topics) is a comprehensive document which consists of the design of the whole programme delineated clearly in terms of teaching materials, as well as, the teaching methods and techniques. Davies (1971) drawing a distinction between the teaching strategies and teaching tactics maintained that teaching strategies 'involved broad methods of instruction' like a lecture, a tutorial, a case study and so on. According to Davies (1971) teaching tactics "involve more detailed aspects of instruction than strategies; indeed, the same tactic, (rules, concepts and principles) can occur in every teaching strategy." These tactics are sometimes interpreted as the teaching techniques like, question-answer, demonstration, introducing, and summarising which are embodied in methods.

Language Teaching Cycle

It would be worthwhile discussing the nature of the programme of language teaching which is essentially a cyclic one. In the

Indian context, the teaching of English language encompasses all the stages of the educational system i.e. right from the primary school level through the middle school, secondary school, undergraduate, and degree to the post-graduate levels. With the exception of the English medium schools, where English is taught right from the Kindergarten stage, it is introduced from the fifth/ sixth standard as a compulsory subject. By this time the learners are supposed to have attained the age of 10 years or so. Each part of the English language teaching programme extends over a period of time and is phased into various stages already pointed out. Since language teaching essentially involves the development of the language skills - listening, speaking, reading and writing - there is no probability of thinking of any such stage in the language teaching programme as being just a linear extension of the stage preceding it. Each of these skills needs to be constantly exercised lest it fades away. The cycle could be described as expansion - reinforcement - consolidation - expansion. One particular stage is a take off stage for a particular group of learners to which there are some pre-requisites. Some new things are taught which become prerequisites to yet another stage and so on. That is what is meant by the cyclic nature of language teaching programme. The new learning has constantly to be revisited, reinforced and consolidated before fresh input is given. The language learning programme must be so designed as to provide ample scope for the drilling of the skills already acquired as well as for their development. This whole process could be represented by the diagram given below:

Figure on next page

Historical perspective vis-a-vis present scene

By way of presenting a historical perspective of foreign language syllabuses and methods of presentation, Mumby (1978) has observed, "Broadly speaking the post-war mainstream of language teaching (and testing) seems to have been concerned more with methodology, with how rather than what to teach, but syllabus design and content has in the present decade been receiving an

increasing amount of attention. There has been a movement away from grammatical syllabus, and then situational syllabi, to what are variously described as notional, functional or communicative syllabi". This shift in emphasis and approach to foreign language teaching and syllabi design seems to have been influenced by two major factors. The first being the impact of the pioneering work done by Van EK, J.A et al (1975) in the council of Europe programme for a unit/credit system for adult language learners and probably secondly, the outstanding contributions of linguists like Widdowson, Sinclair, Candlin, Trimble and their colleagues in the area of discourse analysis both written and oral.

Designing English for Special Purpose (ESP) Courses

Mumby (1978) further goes on to maintain that "the area of syllabi design which requires more systematic attention is the communication needs of the learner, especially the derivational relationship of syllabus specification to such needs. In terms of designing courses in English for special purposes (ESP) this seems to us to be of crucial importance." Suggesting a meaning and scope of the English for specific purposes, Mumby (1978) defined ESP courses as being "Those where the syllabus and materials are determined in all essentials by the prior analysis of the

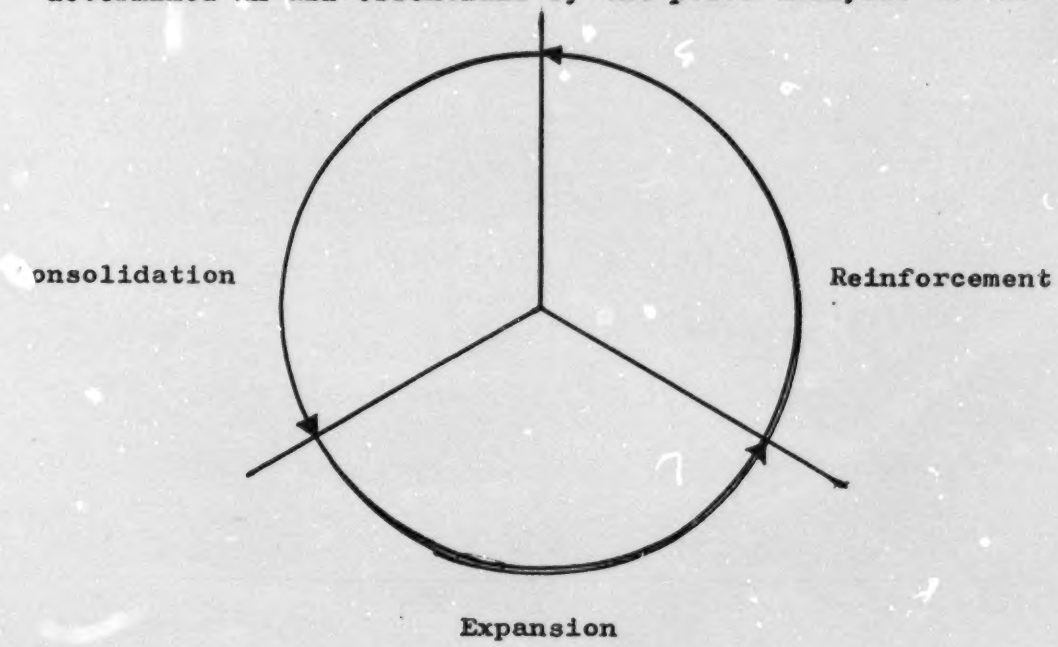

Fig.1: Language Teaching Cycle

communication centred criteria such as the teacher's or institution's predetermined preference for general English or for treating English as part of a general deducation."

Advancing a similar argument and describing the special purpose language courses commonly known as ESP, Wilkins (1976) goes on to say that these are the courses "....in which the learners' objectives are usually well defined." Wilkins also refers to the concept of 'varieties of language (registers)' much in the same lines as was done by Halliday, et al (1964) and the types of English like legal English, Technical English, Medical English and the like. Halliday et al (1964) introducing the concept of 'language register' observed that "language varies as its function varies; it differs in different situations. The name given to a variety of language distinguished according to its use is 'register'. The category of 'register' is needed when we want to account for what people will do with their language."

In view of the above, there could be many different registers of English. A particular group of students 'pursuing a special academic discipline, e.g. sciences, Engineering and technology, agriculture, medicine, veternary and soon, should have command over the register of its own subject. One register would be different from another largely in vocabulary and also in terms of the grammatical patterns used. What we now need to have is a fairly accurate description of each kind of register in terms of vocabulary (register of Physical Sciences, social sciences etc) and the grammar it is likely to use. Once such descriptions are made available in different subject disciplines, it might be possible to derive a common core of English, which would be common to all registers. Thus all the students would need to master this common core of English,in our context say at Higher secondary level, as a minimum requisite. Having prepared a common linguistic background in general English, if we would like to call it so, the students could be exposed to the remaining part of each specific register as they are admitted to the discipline of their choice - sciences, Engineering and Technology, Medicine, Agriculture etc. It doesnot seem academically sound and useful on a practical plane to teach the same kind of vocabulary and

grammatical structures and compositions to the students of all the subject disciplines. Hence we need to design ESP courses in English, so that the desired language skills and language abilities may develop in the students.

Singh (1982) expressing his apprehensions regarding the ESP courses which are becoming popular day by day observes. "If ESP cannot meet his (Learner's) international or social language needs, or enable him to function as a whole person within a foreign or second language environment, then he fails to satisfy his communicative needs. What the ESP learner wants to do through English is more important than mastery of ESP as a never-to-be used subject."

With reference to the above I would like to make an observation, ESP courses are introduced after the learners have prepared a general base in language i.e. at Higher Secondary level in our context. ESP courses are designed mainly with a view to facilitating the learners both during studies and also in their professional life i.e. on the job. Thus instead of being designated 'ESP as a never-to-be used subject' I would tend to describe it as ever-to-be used subject; as while on job he is confronted with that typical jargon of the trade and the sentence structures and expressions which are peculiar to his job. As for the statement that teaching of language, should enable him to fulfil social obligations as a citizen or a member of a society is concerned. I am in perfect agreement to the author. But for enabling them to satisfy the communicative needs as human beings, the course designers need to make some additional provision in the curriculum by way of giving them some exposure to topics of social sciences and humanities as well as professional studies. What I want to drive at is that while planning a language course, for whatever level it is meant, a judicious balance needs to be struck between the social role and the professional role that English has to play in the learners' life. As regards the fulfillment of the international obligations (speaking to an English speaking foreigner) I have my own reservations. How often do we need to do so ? And, if at all one is engaged in such a linguistic encounter, the English language background that one has as a base would not let him feel handicapped.

Curriculum Development Model

Any educational system aims at developing, inculcating and perpetuating certain knowledge, skills, attitudes and values in the learners undergoing that system. Curriculae of a course or any subject for that matter are a comprehensive document comprising sufficient information about what to teach the students and how to teach them. Curriculae thus serve as structures on which teaching and learning is based.

Designing of the curriculae for a particular course is a highly complex task, which requires a lot of relevant data and expert personnel from different fields - educational, social, industrial and so on - to make use of the data while taking crucial decisions. No amount of adhocism is desirable in designing a document of such a key nature which consists of guidelines regarding what should be taught and how should it be taught? In order to proceed in a systematic and logical way one certainly needs to resort to some theoretical basis. A number of educationists, psychologists and pedagogues have been applying their minds to the issue of arriving at a theory of curriculum design. These attempts have resulted into a good number of curriculum models. These models could be thought of as stepping stones which might pave the way to curriculum theory. The model suggested below might meet the requirements of this paper.

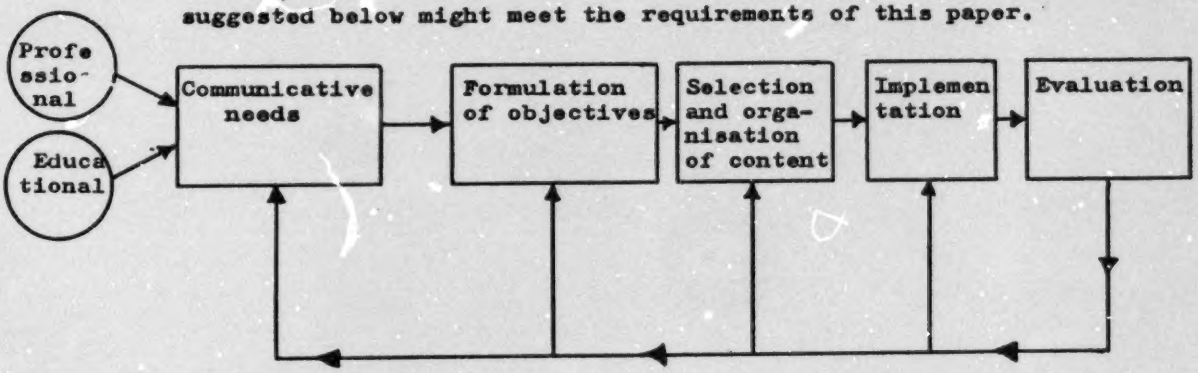

Fig.2: Curriculum Development Model.

The curriculum model at figure-2 is an adopted version of a similar model followed by the Curriculum Development Centre at Technical Teachers' Training Institute (WR) Bhopal in 1971.

This model takes the students needs (professional, social, educational and so on) as the take off point for the curriculum designers and the touch down point for the prospective students. From these needs, which could be arrived at by a variety of ways and means like conducting surveys for job analysis, preparing job descriptions, activity profiles involving curriculum planners, teachers, administrators, examiners, students, employers and the like, emanate the objectives to be achieved in terms of students' terminal behaviour. The next stage in this process is the selection and organisation of the course contents in terms of subjects which need to be presented to the students using adequate methods and techniques of teaching and learning. This stage forms part of the implementation of the whole design. In the end, there is a provision for a system of Evaluation of the students' achievements. The data obtained through this evaluation is fed back to the different components of the model which are ultimately adjusted, readjusted and modified by the teachers and those concerned at the appropriate time.

Moving now on to the curriculum planning for English teaching, a course designer needs to give some thought to the modus operendi of the whole exercise. It is important to note that the planning of the teaching of English language at any particular level as indicated earlier can never be embarked upon in utter disregard to the stages which precede and follow it. In the case of designing an English language teaching programme the students' entry level and the terminal level sometimes also called entry behaviour and terminal behaviour must be determined in advance as they serve as the limits of the course. In other words, these are starting and the ending points in the journey of language learning and teaching. These levels must be predetermined in terms of language skills - listening, speaking, reading and writing as well as the language abilities (content) - vocabulary (lexical items) and structures (grammatical items). The course designer should present the dovetailing of the targets selected for the next stage and the targets for the earlier stage.

An attempt would now be made to arrive at an ESP approach to design language course for the polytechnic students offering various disciplines like Civil, Mechanical and Electrical Engineering and other allied fields of engineering education. The polytechnic diploma level might be put under the undergraduate level, as indicated in the language teaching cycle, since it lies between the post-higher secondary school and the degree levels. The requisite qualification for the entrants of the first year of polytechnics is either High School or Higher Secondary school, of course, with mathematics, physics and chemistry i.e. science subjects. These students learn English a subject compulsorily upto this stage and they are supposed to have about 6 years of schooling in English subject.

Since the medium of instruction and examination in a majority of Indian States at the polytechnic level is English, these students are obliged to learn English as a subject at this level. Even if the medium of instruction and examination in some of the Indian States at the polytechnic level is the regional language, the students have to learn English as a 'library language' i.e. for reference purposes. Tiwari (1982) has observed that the phrase 'English as a library language' gained countrywide popularity after the publication of Education Commission (1964-66) report which advised the Government of India, Ministry of Education, saying that "English should be the most useful 'library language' in higher education and our most significant window on the world." Discussing the role to be played by English as a 'library language' as well as a 'language of comprehension' Tiwari (1982) has observed that teaching of English language in the Indian context "envisages the development of certain abilities in the students. These may be the abilities to understand the written material in subjects they (students) offer, to read materials written in English at an optimum speed; to refer to the relevant literature; to make a precis/summary of what has been read by way of making notes; and to express the contents read through English in one's (student's) own mother tongue/ regional language by way of translating it."

A Suggested approach

Keeping an eye on the important considerations of English language curriculum design which have been discussed earlier, it would be worthwhile to have a glimpse at the curriculum development model given (Fig.2). Students' needs could be viewed as having two dimensions: firstly the professional needs and secondly the educational needs. The former refer to the language skills and abilities which may be required of them while performing the actual jobs and the latter refer to the communicative needs to be fulfilled during the studies in the institutions. The data of these kind of needs could be gathered partly through conducting job surveys and partly through the experience of the practising teachers in the field. Assessment of these communicative needs would give definite idea to the curriculum designers about the target level to be achieved by the learners. This target level is also known as the terminal behaviour of the students.

The target level having been decided upon, it would be very essential for the course designers to make an assessment of the existing level of linguistic achievement of the entrants. In other words, the entry behaviour of the students has got to be assessed. Of the very many techniques used for this purpose, the estimation of the target level of the earlier course (qualifying examination) would be of immense help. Since the educational programmes are a continuum where the target level of one stage becomes the entry point for the other stage and so on and so forth. This estimate could be further strengthened and validated by the practising teachers in the field.

Once both the stages i.e. the entry behaviour and the terminal behaviour in terms of students' actual achievement and the targets to be achieved are set, the process of designing a flyover of methods and materials remains to be prepared. This process may involve the preparations of instructional materials in the form of textbooks, learning packages, workbooks and other aids. These teaching materials are to be presented before the students through a variety of teaching strategies and tactics which, in other words, could be designated as teaching methods and techniques.

The practising English teacher in polytechnics might be faced with a situation where he might find a sizeable gap between the assumed entry behaviour and the actual entry behaviour of the students. The language teacher need not feel perturbed with this kind of situation. Such gaps are bound to emerge, since the very starting point was based on assumptions. These assumptions may sometimes be true and occasionally, though may be baffling. In these circumstances, the teacher is left with no other alternative but to identify these gaps, may be by administering diagnostic tests on all the students of the class in the beginning of the academic session itself. The test results would give the teacher a fair idea of the areas of linguistic weaknessess on the part of the students.

Design of Remedial Courses

The data gathered through these diagnostic tests could be analysed and specific areas of weakness in terms of vocabulary items and grammatical structures could be arrived at. Subsequently, the teacher can design a remedial course of an optimum duration. The whole class might undergo such a remedial course, as it will be a kind of revision for those who already possess the requisite knowledge and skills in those areas, and a new learning for those who are deficient in these areas. This approach applies to an individual teacher in an institution facing a particular group of students.

There might be instances of the same phenomena occurring in other institutions of the state. If this is so, then the practising teachers might approach the proper forum and place a demand on them to design a common remedial course or a bidge intensive course whatever the nomenclature might it be assigned. The spirit behind such a course must be to bridge the identified gaps - between the assumed and actual entry behaviour in terms of the linguistic attainments of the polytechnic entrants.

Once the duration of the bridge course is over and the students have developed the requisite knowledge and skills of language, they may be given the exposure of the instructional materials specifically designed as per their communicative needs.

The curriculum should be implemented with regard to its educational requirements. The teachers should monitor the students' progress intermittently and go on modifying their teaching on the basis of the feedback obtained. In the end, the students should be tested for their achievements in the final Board Examination.

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